NEWS AND COMMENT IN THE WORLD OF ART

By HENRY McBRIDE.

DURING the past season there have been several little flurries of excitement over false attributions of dubious works of art to well known American painters. It seems that these excitements increase in number and fury in direct ratio as the prices of the artists increase. To stop the traffic in imitation masterpieces is impossible, but it would seem as though something more might be done to safeguard the public than is at present attempted.

I have often thought of a society, for instance, that would make a business of recording the works of such contemporaries who appear to be likely to keep the interest of another generation. Even such a thing as taking charge of the effects of an eminent artist at his death, and selling them, if they must be sold, officially, is a great help. The little red stamp upon the Twachtman pictures, for instance, is a great help to connoisseurs; and the admirably exact manner in which Durand-Ruel photographed every item left by Degas placed the entire art world under an obligation and put a decided chill upon the Degas factories.

There are vexations and uncertainties in the way of any such society, of course, but they could be greatly simplified by those who could study the problem professionally. It might even be a welcome task for some of our academicians who have passed the age of incessant creation and yet still find a certain fascination in serving upon committees.

"Apres Le Cubisme," by Ozenfant and Jeanneret

In the review of the Schamberg memorial exhibition a few quotations were given from "Apres le Cubisme," by Ozenfant and Jeanneret. The quotions were from the beginning of the new little book. Some comment seems to be required upon them, and it is also but fair to hint at the conclusions arrived at by the authors.

It is, of course, surprising enough to Americans to have Messrs. Ozenfant and Jeanneret calmly passing on from cubism as from a *fait accompli* to a study of the after events. Here cubism has by no means been regarded as a *fait accompli* and the professors and museum directors with a unanimity of purpose never before seen among them have simply buried their heads in the sands waiting for the storm to blow over. The storm is still blowing, however, and the professors and museum directors have by this time got so much sand in their eyes that there is now no hope that they will read either the Messrs. Ozenfant and Jeanneret's words or mine.

These authors, in a study of present conditions, make the accusation that modern artists, sculptors, architects are not attuned to modern life. They say that were it left to these people there would be no art produced at all nowadays; but that luckily, in unexpected and out of the way places, the true quality of this the Machine Age is being registered just the same. They cite the factories in the suburbs of great cities, that are built on economic and new lines and the magnificences of the new machinery; and insist that these things are beautiful and as true to us and our time as the Parthenon was to the Greeks.

To the purist they are, undoubtedly; and, as it happens, "purism" is the name our authors give to the art which they wish to see supersede cubism.

The usual objection on the part of the conservative to the art of Picabia, Schamberg, and those who now intend to be purists, is that artists should not succumb to the trend of the times, that art is or should be an escape from the facts of life.

Is it? Is Shakespeare an escape from his period? True, he cast a passing glance upon the charms of Cleopatra, but is it not, upon the whole, the music of his own time that escapes from his pages? There are sports in art who have shut their eyes completely to the aspirations of their particular period, but of a truth archaistic art is always cramped and necessarily second class.

What "purism" in art is to be is not quite clear after a hasty run through Messrs. Ozenfant and Jeanneret's study, and particularly is it not clear after a glance at a dozen or so illustrations of their newest paintings, which presumably are "pure." The weak point in the work, as in the new programme, is exactly that that they urge against the despised academicians—it is far too conscious of its operations. What they say of the new architecture that is coming through the engineers and the new beauty that comes through the machines is exactly true, but it is altogether likely that the new expression in painting will come for a long time unnoticed also. The vacancy of art to life is a thing best seen with a little perspective.

People whose tastes have been formed upon classic precedent yield reluctantly to the new forms. I recall two occasions upon which scales of prejudice fell from my eyes, and both events concerned automobiles. Most of those who are now able to toddle must remember the curious slowness with which the automobile came into its present reasonable shape. At first the mind of the designers clung to the idea of the horse carriage, and the original cars were as like them as possible. Some years before the war, when the Bennett Cup Races were still considered great sporting events, I blundered upon one of these competitions in a remote part of Belgium. The cars, which were driven by amateurs, including one of the then young Vanderbilts, were to race 600 or 800 miles over country roads. When the racers finally came bounding by I confess I was at first shocked by the gaunt, skeletonized machines. They were built exclusively for power and not for show. They were rude but strong. One of my Belgian friends, much more "pure" by instinct than I, exclaimed upon their "beauty." I was as disturbed as an academician at the startling claim of my friend, whom I knew to be sincere. Before the morning ended, however, I had become a convert. Never after that could I bear to see an automobile that resembled in any degree a horse carriage.

The second little lesson occurred in 1915 when I saw the thousands of army motors in France that had been manufactured in a great hurry and with great science for "pure" business. They were simplified to straighter lines than any I had seen in America, and the French, with quick perception, adapted the lines to the cars for civilians, as soon as civilians were found with sufficient funds to buy them. But the point is that the automobile came into its real form through stress, and not because of any dreaming designers.

We are now fully launched into the machine era. Even the congress of art experts who met at the museum a few weeks ago took their heads out of the sand long enough to admit this. The speakers made it plain that objects made by hand will no longer be available for our citizens, so costly has labor, under democracy, become. The alternative they propose, is to teach the machines to do imitations of hand-and-brain work.

But to the "purists" this seems a compromise nothing short of hypocrisy. Instead of making imitations that deceive no one, the new school of designers would like to ape the innate sincerity of the machine; and since we must have machine work let us have it as purely and unaffectedly machinelike as possible. In that way only, they feel, shall we arrive at expressing our period. In that way only will new forms develop, founded on intense practicality.

A few quotations from the last chapter of the book which begins with the admirable saying of Montesquieu: "Ce qui fait les grandes beautés, c'est lorsqu'une chose est telle que la surprise est d'abord médiocre, qu'elle se soutient, augmente, et nous même ensuite à l'admiration" are in order.

"Purism," say these writers, "does not express the variations but the *invariant*. The work should not be accidental, exceptional, impressionistic, inorganic, *protestaire*, picturesque, but on the contrary, general, static, expressive of the *invariant*."

"Purism should conceive clearly, execute loyally, exactly, directly; it turns away from troubled conceptions and summary or tortured executions."

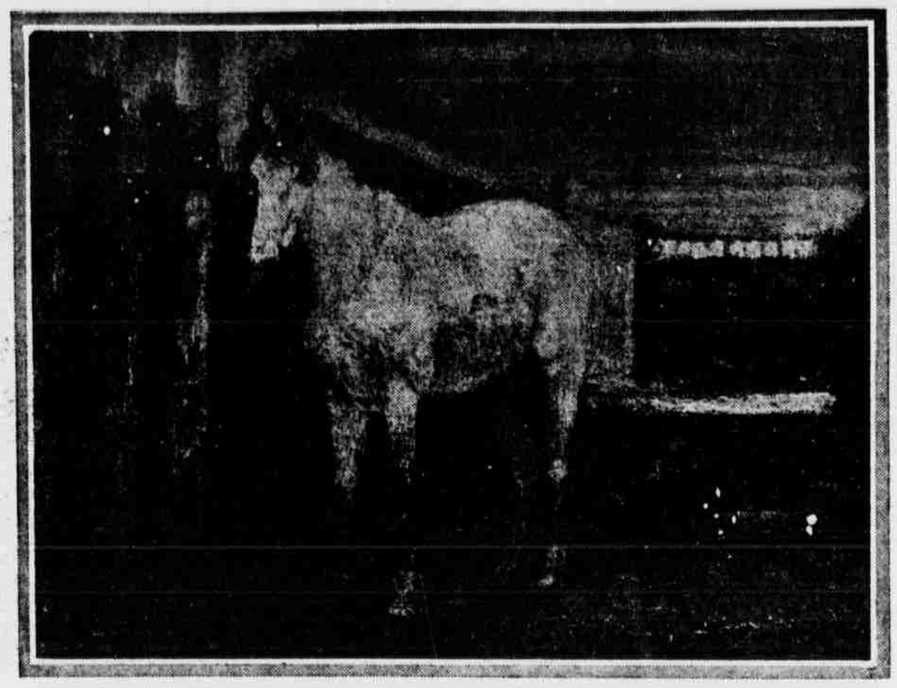
"Art is above all in the conception."

"Technique is but a tool humbly at the service of inspiration."

"Purism fears the bizarre and the 'original.' It seeks a pure element in which to reconstruct organized pictures which seem to have been produced by nature herself."

"The Purist does not mean by a return to nature a return to the copying of nature."

"All liberties are allowed to art except that of not being clear."



"The White Horse," by Albert Pinkham Ryder, on exhibition at Kraushaar Galleries.

Courbet's portrait of Gueymard the singer. Given by Mrs. E. M. Anderson to the Metropolitan Museum.

Revolutionary Art No Longer Shocks

Mrs. Elizabeth Milbank Anderson has given Courbet's portrait of the singer Gueymard to the Metropolitan Museum. This singer was a famous tenor at the opera in Courbet's day, and he is shown at the moment when he sings "Oui, l'or est une chimere," from the first act of the opera, "Robert le Diable."

"Robert is sitting on the corner of a table," writes Mr. Burroughs in the museum's *Bulletin*, "holding aloft the dice box with which he is about to make the cast that is to decide his fortune. The gesture is theatrical ('which is here fitting,' says Riat), and he is looking at the audience instead of his opponents in the game, who lean on the opposite side of the table. In the background at the right is the sinister figure of his evil genius Bertram."

"The picture was painted in 1856-57 and shown at the Salon of the latter year with five other magnificent paintings, two of which, 'The Quarry' and the portrait of Mme. Crocq, form part of our present exhibition. Of the three others the 'Young Ladies on the Shores of the Seine' belongs to the city of Paris and is now exhibited at the Petit Palais; the 'Roe Run Down in the Snow' and 'The Shores of the Loue' are in private collections in Europe.

"This very strong group of pictures was Courbet's response to the reactionary policy which had been adopted at the Salon of that year, when the rule which allowed the artists to elect half the jury had been rescinded. This had been done with the idea of purifying the exhibition of the direful traits which painting was then rapidly taking on. M. Fould, a minister of state, in making a speech to the young artists, accentuated the dangers which threatened. 'Art is on the brink of destruction,' he said, 'when abandoning the pure and lofty regions of the beautiful and the traditional paths of the great masters it follows the teachings of the new school of realism and aims at nothing but a servile imitation of what is the least poetic, the most vulgar in nature.'

"It astounds us to-day to conceive how these pictures by the founder of the 'new school of realism' could arouse the official ire. The realistic qualities of the Gueymard are now hardly noticeable; the subject is certainly altogether romantic—one that Delacroix might have chosen. It is only in the insistence on the solidity of the forms and in the robustness of the treatment that the 'servile imitation' which the Realists practised shows itself."

Mr. Sargent's "Gassed" at the Academy

Mr. Sargent gets off very lightly with the London critics for his war picture "Gassed," in the Royal Academy. The *Sunday Observer's* man is about the only one to look at it askance—he says it's a "large failure"—but all the others chorus with the words "great," "noble," &c. The *Observer's* opinion is this:

"In this room hangs the Sargent 'Gassed,' lent by the Imperial War Museum. It is a panel, not quite as long as the huge John cartoon which hung in the same place during the Canadian War Memorial exhibition. In the foreground lie the strewn bodies of the gassed men, with their eyes bandaged; across the picture troops a file of other gassed cases, less evilly injured than those recumbent, but also blinded, or temporarily so, each clinging to the shoulder of the one before him, the line led by a Red Cross orderly; beyond their feet another strewing of the gassed, unable to walk, and between the legs of the stumblers, far away in the sunlight, may be seen a game of football.

"This is a prosaic description of the subject chosen by Mr. Sargent; he has added nothing to it. Neither in his color, nor in his composition, nor in the expressions of the faces does he convey any hint that will strike the real truth of this episode of war further home to the spectator than these few lines can give. It is the function of the artist to reveal. He is not a merely complicated camera. If he cannot make or force the spectator to recognize some great truth which the unaided imagination cannot conjure up, he has failed. We may recognize the enormous technical power needed even to create in realism so large a canvas, and do this the fullest justice, yet regret an imagination not worthy of the power. Another large failure which would be better in photograph is Miss Anna Airy's 'The L Press Forging an 18-inch Gun,' again lent by the Imperial War Museum."

The *Morning Post's* critic writes: "We do not agree with the pundits who declare that British art has reached a critical stage of sleeping sickness. They expect to find geniuses as plentiful as are lawyers or labor leaders. One swallow may not make a summer, but a masterpiece by Sargent in a Royal Academy exhibition should be sufficient to brighten the winter even of the dyspeptic's discontent. Besides, there are, as we have seen, other gloom dispelling influences at Burlington House. Among the more charming of these are Mr. D. Y. Cameron's landscapes 'April Snows' and the 'Sounds of Kerrera'."

D. Y. Cameron as a gloom dispeller is an item of news. Mr. Cameron paints strongly—he is more able as a painter than as an etcher—but when he takes a brush in his hand he is the famous British Spleen personified. But it must be as the *Morning Post* says.

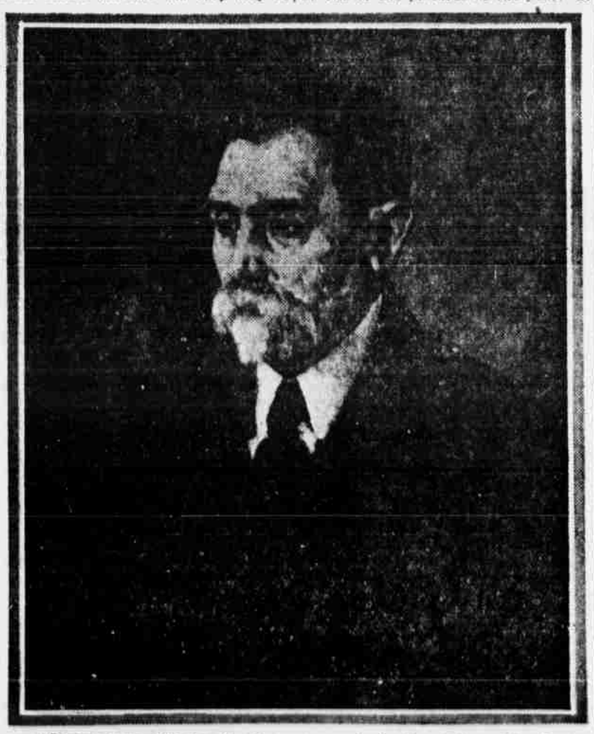
The *Times* makes a most manful attempt to praise the Sargent contributions, but winds up in some uncertainties. It says:

"The 'picture of the year' is of course Mr. Sargent's 'Gassed' (120), lent by the Imperial War Museum. It should be seen first from a distance, from the Sculpture Room, where it can be seen alone. It is a picture which no critic could pretend to judge finally at a first seeing. The intention is clear at once. A train of soldiers, gassed, blinded and bandaged, is led across the canvas, no doubt from a clearing station to some place of rest. The ground is crowded with soldiers lying down and also gassed, and there is another train moving on the right of the canvas. Far behind are soldiers playing football, and this background is a kind of counterpoint to the procession of pain in front. The contrast is effective at once and is expressed not merely in the subject but also in the movement and grouping of the figures. Further, Mr. Sargent has not spoilt the picture by any unreal sentiment. But the doubt arises whether his very way of painting, of seeing, is suited to his purpose in this work, whether his truth of atmosphere, which is a habit with him, is not merely irrelevant. The theme seems to demand to be treated not archaistically but with more emphasis on the design and so on the pure human interest. These figures, as Mr. Sargent paints them, are still figures in a landscape; as a great Florentine, Andrea del Castagno, or Masaccio, would have painted them, they would be supreme over all their surroundings. And they ought to be supreme, because they are all the subject of the picture. Out of this pain the design should be made; our criticism, which might be withdrawn after further seeing, is that it is not made altogether out of that; and that the mind, therefore, is a little bewildered and thwarted by the fact that a theme so tragic does not master the whole canvas. But, admitting all this, Mr. Sargent has treated a great and moving theme vividly and without making it ridiculous, and that is a considerable achievement.

"We doubt whether Mr. Walter Bayes's "Pulvis et Umbra" (564) will be one of the pictures of the year. It is too unlike what the public is used to at the Academy; but we congratulate the Academy for hanging it. It represents a wrestling match in the courtyard of a Spanish or Italian inn, and we would ask those who are shocked by it to confess what a vivid sense it gives them of the wrestlers, the crowd, the place and the sunlight. It is a pity that Mr. Bayes has spun an unintelligible pattern over the figures below. It would not matter if the picture were a purely abstract piece of design; but it is a very vivid representation of actual human beings. Otherwise you enjoy the expressive drawing and grouping of the figures, the device of the great shaft of sunlight crossing the middle of the picture, the manner in which the whole is unified. Mr. Bayes's learning has all come alive.

"As for other 'pictures of the year' there are few or none except Mr. Sargent's 'President Wilson.' This, by a piece of luck, is probably the finest portrait in the exhibtion. Mr. Sargent, if anybody, should know an American, and he has made the President American all over, but without any forcing of the note of nationality. One has the very feeling of the climate in his sharpness, clearness and resolution. There is more will than temperament, but idealism instead of Prussian ruthlessness. We see behind the professor the homeliness of 'Uncle Sam,' of the New England farmer. It is a republicanism more elegant than that of Lincoln, but not less democratic. Certainly Mr. Sargent has profited by his rest from portrait painting."

Boy, by George Bellows, on exhibition at Montross Gallery.



"Ornstein's Father." Recent portrait by Léon Kroll.

Notes and Activities in World of Art

An exhibition of foreign handicraft has been brought together by the Art Alliance of America with the aid of the Neighborhood Houses. The purpose is to stimulate a demand for well designed, hand made goods produced in the United States.

The patrons include Mrs. John Henry Hammond, Mrs. Luke Vincent Lockwood, Mrs. Charles Cary Rumsey, Mrs. Ripley Weisse, Mr. Thomas McLane, Miss Irene Lewisohn, Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, Miss I. N. Cammann and the Consul-Generals of France, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Persia, Spain and Sweden.

The exhibition, which will be free to the public, will be held in the galleries of the Art Alliance of America from June 4 to June 21. Craftsmen in native costume will be at work weaving, carving, making jewelry, &c.

We have among our foreign population, says the committee, every type of craftsman trained in his own land to make beautiful objects. These people came here with ideals and dreams which have not always been realized. There are talented people of all nationalities who are willing and anxious to leave the "job" they were obliged to take when they landed, and go back to their beautful trades if we can only give them the opportunity.

The American distributor used to go to Europe and to Asia for his hand made embroideries, weavings, carvings, &c., while in this country only machine made goods were produced. The great war has opened our eyes to the need for industrial art in America.

To encourage, revive and develop the handicrafts and the home art industries throughout the United States is a piece of reconstruction work worthy of the support and patronage of all Americans.

To secure funds for the maintenance of the artistic industries section of the Art Alliance of America it is proposed to hold a peasant ball next November.

The peasant costumes worn by the craftsmen in the galleries during this exhibition of foreign handicraft can be reproduced and made during the summer through the Settlement House of each nationality. This will start the embroidery, leather, jewelry and other industries by giving work to the people during the summer.

The following is a copy of a letter that has just been sent to the President in France:

"Honorable Woodrow Wilson,
President of the United States,
Paris, France.

"Sir: A group of Americans who realize the importance of art as a national asset and who are deeply stirred by the example of Great Britain, France, Canada, Italy and Australia in sending their best artists to the front to create permanent national records of the war, its heroism, sacrifice and suffering have deputed me to send you this letter. We deplore the fact that thus far very little has been done to bring before present and future generations of Americans the great and inspiring part our country played in the war.

"We urge that a number of our leading artists be sent abroad immediately to paint from actual observation our historic battlefields, portraits of our army and navy leaders, of our soldiers, the life of our Army of Occupation on the Rhine, the scenes of war, the stupendous results of our efforts in engineering, railway building, hospital equipment, shipping and all other branches of our war activity. We also regret deeply that we have missed the opportunity of gaining the services of our greatest painter, Sargent, who has just painted for the British Government a monumental war canvas.

"It may be too late to paint incidents of warfare, but modern war consists not merely of fighting. There are still immense fields to be covered if immediate action be taken. We appeal to you, therefore, for approval of such a project. The inspiring Canadian example proves that a national memorial of this kind can be created without the financial, though not without the moral and practical support of the Government. The success of such a project would mean the presentation to our Government of the finest kind of a war memorial.

"ALBERT EUGENE GALLATIN."

C. R. W. Nevinson, who is at present showing his etchings and lithographs at the Kepel Gallery will return to London via Halifax during the next two weeks. Mr. Nevinson will hold an important exhibition of his paintings at the Bourgeois Gallery next spring, when he will pay a return visit to New York.

An exhibition that is now being arranged by the Kingore Galleries and is expected to open there on June 4 will be devoted to portraits by the late Robert MacCameron. Mr. MacCameron was popular socially in New York and many of his sitters were prominent New Yorkers.

Among the portraits to be shown are those of the following: Robert Chanler, Benjamin Guinness, Mrs. Benjamin Guinness, Dorothy Iselin, the Phipps children, William Astor Chanler, Mrs. William Astor Chanler, Mrs. Bourke Cockran, Mrs. Norman de R. Whitehouse, Mrs. Henry Clews, Joe Thomas and Mrs. Robert Goelet's children.

An interesting collection of early naval prints has been placed on view in the Kennedy Galleries, including many rare American subjects. History was touched up in rather a cavalier fashion by many of the early printers, but after all is said and done, the color prints evoke for us the famous events as well as the written accounts do. It is generally said that these works of art are valued chiefly for their quaintness, but there an injustice is done our early artists. The vast majority of the prints that Kennedy & Co. are now showing would survive upon their merits even if they had no historic associations. In each there are to be found truths to nature expressed in a personal way, sometimes a fine sky, sometimes peculiar depth and richness in the sea. And almost invariably the decorative effect is impressive.

Among the American subjects are some of our most famous naval battles, views of old sailing vessels, yachts, steamboats and whalers. The exhibition will be accessible to the public during June.

The *Art Notes*, published by the Macbeth Galleries, has this in its April issue on the subject of spurious pictures:

The January issue of *Art Notes* had something to say about the responsibility of the press to that part of the public which looks to it for information, either as news or as criticism, in art matters. On two occasions since the force of the argument has been brought home, though in a different direction from that previously under discussion.

It is high time to sound a warning against the art critic or art reporter who either without due thought or due knowledge—and unfortunately it is as often the latter as the former—lends the approval of his paper to the authenticity of pictures exposed for public sale. Because a beautiful picture is ascribed to Wyant in a catalogue is no reason in itself for the critic to describe it as a beautiful Wyant. It may be beautiful and it may follow the Wyant manner, without, in any way, being a Wyant.

No picture bearing the names of the men most copied should be described as by them unless the critic or reporter has definite knowledge of his facts. If he does not know, it is easy enough for him to get information from those who do. A newspaper should be as careful in its editorial as in its advertising columns to see that its public is not deceived in what it buys. It should indeed be the more careful editorially, since a commendation is really a recommendation, which an advertisement is not.

The whole subject of spurious pictures needs far more attention than it has yet received. As time goes on and more and more of our painters, past and present, are in demand the field of the picture forger is enlarged tremendously. Time was when Inness and Blakelock were the only ones imitated, but to them have now been added many more, notably Wyant and Twachtman. Most recently Ranger and Winslow Homer, both in oil and water color, have been added to the active list, while occasional examples attributed even to men still living have made their appearance.

A close guess can be made as to the authors of many of these canvases, and the sources of their distribution have been more or less accurately traced. Until some law not now upon our statutes is framed to put a stop to the nefarious trade it must still go on. We are told that the only legal proof of picture forgery is in the actual seeing of the name being put on the canvas. Such proof is, except by an accident which is most unlikely to happen, quite unobtainable.

It seems incredible that there is not sufficient interest throughout the country to start something toward protecting our artists and the buyers of their work. We shall be glad to cooperate in any way that we can with those who have the authority to initiate the proper legislation.